

Council to launch investigation Travellers' benefits to be reviewed

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A MAJOR council investigation is underway after it emerged traveller landlords at Dale Farm are cashing in on state benefits.

Officers at Basildon District Council have found several travellers who own plots at the Crays Hill site are being paid to cover ground rent for poor families and others are getting public handouts to rent their caravans from a private firm in Sussex.

Tony Ball, leader of Basildon District Council, said the situation was under review. "This issue doesn't concern everybody at the site but about three or four years ago we went to a tribunal to see if they were entitled to claim benefits," he explained.

"It concluded they were because they were covered by all the injunctions and the two-year policy by John Prescott, so



UNDER SCRUTINY: Traveller landlords at Dale Farm are being investigated by Basildon District Council

at that time they were legally settled.

Injunctions

"Since the House of Lords decided not to hear their case they are now there illegally, so their benefits are being reviewed."

Families have claimed varying amounts, depending on the size of their caravans, but some have received £130 a week.

Cllr Ball said the final decision on whether the payments continue lies with the Department of Work and Pensions.

It is thought they have already frozen some payments.

Spokesman for the site Grat-tan Puxon said he believed people on low incomes should still be entitled to claim benefits and revealed the ownership of Dale Farm was split into several different sections.

He said: "I'm no expert but I think people on low incomes should still claim."

"Our whole point now is that the council should find us more legal pitches and until that happens, people should be allowed to stay."

Ian Gridley, who lives in a bungalow next to the site, said: "All the benefits and payments should be stopped. It's totally wrong to benefit financially from an illegal site."

Find gipsies land to prevent violence

EFFORTS are being stepped up to find travellers legal sites after the government agreed to search for public land.

Billerica and Wickford MP John Baron and council leader Tony Ball are trying to persuade the Government to find disused land outside the district to house travellers in order to

prevent a violent eviction.

After talks with Communities Minister Shahid Malik last week, Mr Baron said: "We had a useful meeting in which we stressed the need to uphold the law in respect of Dale Farm, but we also urged the minister to identify transit sites outside the district so as to avoid the need

for a forced eviction and the misery that would bring.

"The minister took on board our concerns and promised to consult his officials about whether unused government land could be found to house travellers as a temporary solution, but this will not delay the council's plan to evict."

Council forced to provide pitches

THE council will be forced to provide 62 legal traveller pitches by the year 2011.

The decision has been set down by the Secretary of State despite constant appeals from Basildon District Council that

it already provides enough sites.

The council is further enraged that neighbouring Southend Council does not have to provide any extra sites.

However, members of the

Ramsden Crays Residents' Association remain confident this will not lead to Dale Farm being legalised.

A spokesman said: "There is no chance that it will ever be an option. It will never happen."